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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002167

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [PTER](#) [KWMN](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [SOCIETY](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: RAMON UNIT BORDER POLICE -- FIGHTING HUMAN
TRAFFICKING, OTHER SMUGGLING ON EGYPT-ISRAEL BORDER

Classified By: Pol/C Norm Olsen for reasons 1.4(b) & (d).

1. (C) Summary: The Ramon Unit of the Border Police has interdicted weapons, human beings and drugs being smuggled across the Egyptian-Israeli border since its establishment in March 2003. Its commander told Poloff that the unit has intercepted 36 women being trafficked into Israel in each of the past two years. The chairwoman of the Knesset panel on trafficking in persons has credited the unit's pressure on smugglers with driving up the cost of smuggling a woman into Israel to USD 8,000-10,000 from USD 3,000-5,000. This cable examines the Ramon Unit's structure, objectives and modus operandi. End Summary.

Ramon Unit History and Structure

2. (C) The GOI Cabinet established the Ramon Unit of the Border Police in March 2003, after the IDF and police authorities determined that the Israeli-Egyptian border needed better monitoring for smuggling, according to Ramon Unit Commander Shalom Peled. The 208-kilometer border, he said, is completely open, and the ease of transporting items into Israel makes smuggling a lucrative and attractive livelihood, regardless of the cargo. The Ramon Unit is comprised of 300 Border Police officers and 200 IDF soldiers, the only such combined unit in Israel. Peled said that he also commands two Border Police units, totaling 200 officers, in Gaza and that these two units will be transferred to the Egyptian-Israeli border area following Gaza disengagement.

Trafficking in Women

3. (C) The Ramon Unit intercepted 36 women, all presumed trafficking victims, as they attempted to enter Israel in 2004, the same number it intercepted in the first nine months of its operations, according to Peled. (Note: A GOI report on trafficking in persons reported the figure for 2004 as 43. Orly Shmuel, a lawyer with the Ministry of Justice explained the discrepancy by saying that seven of these women were entering Israel as foreign workers and 36 were caught entering as prostitutes and presumed to be trafficked. End Note.) Ramon Unit spokesperson Ilan Azimi said the unit could not estimate how many women cross the Egyptian-Israeli border each year, but, according to the Israel Police, the total number of women trafficked into Israel for the purpose of prostitution in 2004 was 1,500-2,000 and in 2003 was 2,000-3,000. The GOI and anti-trafficking NGOs assess that most trafficked women are crossing into Israel over the Egyptian border. Peled noted, however, what he said are indications that many trafficked women continue to successfully enter Israel via the airport and the seaport, although he could not offer precise figures. Peled claimed that an increasing number of those successfully entering through the airport are disguised as "missionaries," but he could not offer further details. Entry through the airport, he commented, has become more difficult since the new Immigration Authority was created in 2002 to crack down on illegal immigrants. Peled said that the pressure that the Immigration Authority has placed on airport entries has had the unintended effect of shifting smuggling and trafficking to the land border.

4. (C) Knesset member Za'hava Gal-on, chair of the Knesset subcommittee on trafficking in women, told Poloff that the Ramon unit has likewise increased difficulties for traffickers of women, a phenomenon reflected, she said, in the price smugglers charge to transport the women. The price of smuggling a woman across the border a few years ago, she said, was USD 3,000-5,000; now the price is USD 8,000-10,000. Representatives of Israel's three main anti-trafficking NGOs, asked to comment on the performance of the Ramon Unit, reported that they do not interact with the unit and are not intimately familiar with its work.

The Ramon Unit: Operational Details

5. (C) Peled said that the Ramon Unit relies on information obtained from intelligence sources, mainly informants. The unit also uses topographical analysis to try to "be one step

ahead of the smugglers," an effort that has proven successful in intercepting smugglers.

16. (C) Israeli Police Interpol officer Carol Hasidim told Poloff that the unit's members patrol the border area via helicopter and surface vehicle. She said that the unit's rules of engagement prohibit its members from opening fire unless they face a clear security threat.

17. (C) Peled complained that the Ramon Unit, which depends on the police for its budget, is "very poor," and can therefore not operate as effectively as it would like. He said that the unit does not have enough resources to "seal" the Egyptian-Israeli border, and that it is thus considering the advisability of using electronic fences to help detect infiltration. He highlighted, however, that the high cost of an electronic fence, approximately USD one million per kilometer, dims prospects for the project. Knesset member Za'hava Galon also assessed that the Ramon Unit needs more resources.

Smuggling of Weapons and Drugs

18. (C) Peled said that the smuggling of weapons and drugs, especially of marijuana, across the Egyptian border has increased in the last several years. According to Ramon unit spokesperson Ilan Azimi, the unit seized 104 AK-47s and seven handguns in 2004, as compared to no weapons in 2003. He said the unit interdicted ten tons of marijuana in 2004, as compared to 15 tons in 2003. The unit, he said, also interdicted 18 kilos of hashish in 2004, after seizing seven kilos of hashish in 2003.

19. (C) Peled blamed the Bedouin for a lot of the smuggling, including what he claimed is the passage of terrorists into Israel. He asserted that the Bedouin do not care what they smuggle, but only that they maintain their livelihood.

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